

“Angry” Judge Featured on YouTube Gets Suspended

[By Donald Scarinci](#)

What does a [Rutgers basketball coach](#) have in common with a West Virginia Judge? Both men have an angry style that looks horrible on YouTube and both lost their jobs because of it.

Putnam County Circuit Court Family Law Judge William M. Watkins III’s angry rants have been viewed on YouTube more than 200,000 times. Like the coach, the video revealed behavior that cost him his job.

[Lawyers](#) and judges are learning the hard way that in the social media age, bad behavior can come back to haunt them. Judge Watkins didn’t get off as easy as the Rutgers coach. The Judge was suspended without pay for the remaining four years of his term. He’s still a judge and therefore can’t make a living practicing law.

As detailed in the [suspension order](#), the judge “concedes that he was repeatedly intemperate with litigants, showed disrespect for authority, and was unable to properly manage his office and staff.” The Board specifically found that Judge Watkins demonstrated a preference for using threats, intimidation, profanity, and shouting rather than the tools available to judges, including civil and criminal contempt, to deal with admittedly difficult litigants. In the [YouTube video](#), Judge Watkins repeatedly tells a pastor appearing before him in a divorce case to “shut up.”

The suspension order further details the following exchange between the judge and a woman seeking a protective order: "Shut up! You stupid woman. Can't even act properly. One more word out of you that you aren't asked a question you're out of here, and you will be found in direct contempt of court and I will fine you appropriately. So, shut your mouth. You know I hate it when people are just acting out of sheer spite and stupidity."

In total, the Judicial Hearing Board determined that the family court judge committed 24 separate violations of nine Canons of the *Code of Judicial Conduct*. They included demonstrating contempt for the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals and other appellate courts and failing to manage his staff and perform official duties, such as entering protective orders into the state's domestic violence registry.

While this is certainly an extreme case of judicial misconduct, it serves as an important reminder that social media—YouTube—reveals what otherwise might be concealed.